

Message Text

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11

ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SAM-01 SAJ-01 NIC-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01

PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 DRC-01 /105 W

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R 211445Z AUG 74

FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6794

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY SOFIA

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

US MISSION BERLIN 1125

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PRAGUE 2021

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CZ, US

SUBJECT: US-CZECHOSLOVAK RELATIONS ON THE SIXTH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE SOVIET INVASION

1. SUMMARY. SIX YEARS AFTER THE SOVIET INVASION,
SCAR TISSUE HAS FORMED; BUT PEOPLE DO NOT FORGET. BETTER
PHYSICAL CONDITIONS AND MORE OPENINGS TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD
GO HAND IN HAND WITH REPRESSION; AND WHILE THE CZECHS AND
SLOVAKS WILL PROBABLY NOT INITIATE ANYTHING, THEIR RESENT-
MENTS -- AND DESIRE FOR A MORE OPEN LIFE -- ARE AN IMPORTANT
PART OF THE REALITY OF EASTERN EUROPE. THE US POLICY
OF DETENTE DOES NOT GIVE THE PEOPLE HOPE OF DELIVERANCE,
BUT IT DOES HOLD OUT HOPE FOR BREATHING ROOM, FOR GRADUAL
IMPROVEMENT: AND THEY ARE VERY MUCH FOR IT. THE EMBASSY
RECOMMENDS THAT WE USE EVERY OPOORTUNITY TO CREATE NEW TIES
AND IMPROVE OLD ONES, BECAUSE IT IS IN THE US INTEREST FOR
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CZECHOSLOVAKIA TO USE THESE TIES WITH THE WEST TO BECOME

HERSELF AGAIN AS MUCH AS THAT IS POSSIBLE. END SUMMARY.

2. THE SIXTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SOVIET INVASION OF CZECHO-SLOVAKIA IS A PROPER OCCASION TO THINK ABOUT WHERE THE COUNTRY STANDS AND HOW IT FITS INTO US POLICY. THE ANNIVERSARY ITSELF WAS MET WITH RESIGNATION, LIKE THE SOVIET INVASION, AND ONLY A FEW EXTRA POLICEMEN ON THE STREETS MARKED THE OCCASION IN PRAGUE. EMBASSY OFFICERS VISITING THE SPOT WHERE JAN PALACH'S GRAVE FORMERLY STOOD FOUND SEVERAL POTS OF FRESH FLOWERS AND A FAIRLY STEADY STREAM OF PEOPLE PAYING THEIR RESPECTS TO THE MEMORY OF THE YOUNG MAN WHO BURNED HIMSELF AS A PROTEST; BUT THERE WERE NO CROWDS, THERE OR ANYWHERE. PERHAPS ONLY IN THE AREAS SURROUNDING THE SOVIET GARRISONS IS ACTUAL CZECH-SOVIET FRICTION EVIDENT IN THE COUNTRY. THE RECENT NEW SOVIET POLICY OF ALLOWING FAMILIES TO JOIN SOME OF THE TROOPS HAS BROUGHT FRESH MISUNDERSTANDING AND BITTERNESS BECAUSE MANY CZECH FAMILIES ARE BEING MOVED OUT OF THEIR APARTMENTS TO MAKE ROOM FOR RUSSIANS. TRAVELERS FROM WESTERN MISSIONS REPORT THAT TOWNSPEOPLE SPEAK OUT HEATEDLY ON THIS SUBJECT WITHOUT ANY PROMPTING. THIS IS OF COURSE A LOCAL PHENOMENON. BUT NO ONE SHOULD THINK THAT CZECHS AND SLOVAKS GENERALLY ARE NOT CONSTANTLY AWARE OF THE OCCUPATION AND RESENTFUL OF IT. SINCE THE REGIME CANNOT LEAVE 1968 ALONE, BUT MUST KEEP TRYING TO JUSTIFY WHAT WAS DONE AND IS BEING DONE, PEOPLE DO NOT FORGET.

3. HOW ARE CONDITIONS HERE SIX YEARS AFTER? IT DEPENDS A LOT ON WHAT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR. A WESTERN DIPLOMAT LEAVING AFTER THREE YEARS HERE SAID IT WAS REMARKABLE THAT IN EVERY VILLAGE YOU FOUND SOMETHING NEW SINCE 1968 -- A POND OR NEW STREET LIGHTS OR SOMETHING -- AS A VISIBLE REMINDER THAT THINGS ARE IMPROVING. ANOTHER WESTERN VISITOR WHO RETURNED AFTER THREE YEARS SAID IT WAS REMARKABLE THAT IN EVERY VILLAGE YOU SAW A NEW STATUE OF THE HAMMER AND SICKLE -- AS A VISIBLE REMINDER THAT THINGS ARE UNDER CONTROL. BOTH STORIES ARE TRUE, AND THEY FIT TOGETHER. NEARLY ALL OBSERVERS AGREE THAT PHYSICAL CONDITIONS HAVE IMPROVED A GREAT DEAL SINCE 1968, AND THAT THE POPULACE HAS TURNED INWARD, CONCENTRATING ON GETTING THE MUNDANE WORK DONE AND RETREATING TO THE COUNTRYSIDE FOR ESCAPE. YET THE HAMMER AND SICKLE IS THERE, AND FOR LARGE

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NUMBERS OF PEOPLE WHO SPOKE OUT IN 1968 DAILY LIFE IS A GRIM DAY-TO-DAY ENCOUNTER WITH DEMOTIONS AND FIRINGS AND HEAVY BACK-PAY CLAIMS FOR ABSURD REASONS. IN OTHER WORDS, THE REPRESSION AND THE DISCONTENT ARE PRESENT. NO ONE EXPECTS A FIRE OUT OF THIS SMOLDERING, BUT FOREIGNERS SOON SHARE THE DEPRESSION OF THE CZECHS SIMPLY OUT OF HEARING SAD STORIES AND SEEING SAD FACES. ONE THOUGHTFUL AND EXPERIENCED FORMER MINISTER TOLD AN AMERICAN FRIEND THIS WEEK THAT HE EXPECTED

TO SEE CZECHOSLOVAKIA SWALLOWED UP BY THE USSR BEFORE HIS DEATH, AND HE WAS VERY GLAD THAT HIS TWO SONS HAD LICENCES SO THEY COULD ALWAYS GET BY AS TRUCK DRIVERS WHEN THEY GOT PURGED FROM PROFESSIONAL RANKS. SOME OBSERVERS SEE CZECHOSLOVAKIA AS A NATION OF TRUCK DRIVERS; OTHERS SEE IT AS A NATION OF DISSIDENTS. IT IS PROBABLY A GREAT DEAL OF BOTH BUT ONE SHOULD NOT EXPECT -- GIVEN THE EXPERIENCE OF 1968 -- THAT THE DISSIDENCE WILL BE MANIFESTED IN ANY PURELY CZECHOSLOVAK CIRCUMSTANCES. RATHER, WHAT HAPPENS HERE OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS WILL DEPEND MOSTLY ON WHAT HAPPENS IN MOSCOW AND ELSEWHERE IN EASTERN EUROPE.

4. WHAT DOES DETENTE MEAN HERE? THE FORMER MINISTER MENTIONED ABOVE TOLD HIS AMERICAN FRIEND, "DETENTE MEANS NOTHING IN REALITY -- BUT FOR GOD'S SAKE KEEP IT GOING IN THE PAPERS" HE MEANT THAT WE WERE NOT IN ANY NEW ERA IN THE SENSE OF GETTING HIM HIS JOB BACK, OR ENABLING HIM TO READ THE NEW YORK TIMES, OR ALLEVIATING POLICE CONTROL OVER HIM; BUT STILL HE FELT THE ONLY HOPE FOR THE FUTURE WAS IN THE INCREASED CONTACTS AND COMMITMENTS THAT GO ON WITHIN WHAT IS MODISHLY CALLED "DETENTE." WE WERE STRUCK BY JIRI PELIKAN'S INTERVIEW IN L'EXPRESS (AUGUST 12 -18), WHERE THE FORMER CZECH TELEVISION CHIEF, ASKED ABOUT THE ANTI-DETENTE VIEWS OF SAKHAROV AGAINST THE PRO-DETENTE VIEWS OF ROY MEDVEDEV, SPOKE OUT FIRMLY FOR THE MEDVEDEV THESIS, ARGUING THAT DETENTE DEPRIVED THE TOTALITARIAN REGIMES ULTIMATELY OF THEIR RATIONALE FOR REPRESSION. PELIKAN SAID DEMOCRATIZATION COULD NOT COME FROM OUTSIDE PRESSURE: "EACH COUNTRY MUST FIGHT FOR ITS OWN CAUSE AND ITS OWN FREEDOM." FROM WHERE WE SIT, THERE IS MORE TRUTH IN THIS VIEW THAN IN FORMER AMBASSADOR BEAM'S VIEW (AS EXPRESSED IN THE WALL STREET JOURNAL OF JULY 24) THAT EASTERN EUROPE HAS BEEN IGNORED BY DETENTE. THE CZECHS AND SLOVAKS WE KNOW DO NOT EXPECT US TO DELIVER THEM, BUT THEY

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DO HOPE THAT MORE ACTIVE AND NUMEROUS EAST-WEST TIES WILL EVENTUALLY GIVE THEM BREATHING ROOM TO WORK TOWARDS THEIR OWN BETTERMENT. THEY ARE FOR OUR POLICY OF DETENTE.

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5. WITH REGARD TO US POLICY, WE WOULD RE-EMPHASIZE THE IMPORTANCE, AS SEEN FROM PRAGUE, OF NOT IGNORING EASTERN EUROPE IN ANY WAY DURING THE FURTHER WORKING OUT OF NORMALIZATION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST. WHILE EVERYONE RECOGNIZES THE OVERRIDING IMPORTANCE OF IMPROVED US-SOVIET RELATIONS, WE TRADITIONALLY LIKE TO SAY THAT 15 MILLION CZECHS AND SLOVAKS AND SOME 128 MILLION EAST EUROPEANS COUNT A GREAT DEAL IN AMERICAN POLICY IN EUROPE AND THE WORLD; AND WE BELIEVE US POLICY TOWARDS EACH OF THE INDEPENDENT COUNTRIES OF EASTERN EUROPE SHOULD BE FORMULATED ON ITS OWN MERITS. WHEN AN INTELLIGENT CZECH TALKS GLOOMILY ABOUT HIS COUNTRY'S BEING INCORPORATED INTO THE USSR, IT SEEMS INCUMBENT ON US TO SHOW THE AMERICAN FLAG HERE AS MUCH AS WE CAN, TO REMIND OUR CZECH AND SLOVAK FRIENDS THAT WE SUPPORT THEIR INDEPENDENT EXISTENCE AND THEIR NATIONAL IDENTITY. THE CZECHOSLOVAK GOVERNMENT, FOR ALL OF ITS BAD AND REPRESSIVE FEATURES, IS WORKING TO RESTORE A NATIONAL IDENTITY, AND EAST-WEST NORMALIZATION -- ESPECIALLY BETTER AND MORE
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NUMEROUS TIES WITH THE UNITED STATES -- IS A HUGE PART OF THIS POLICY. IN THE LONG RUN, THIS RESTORATION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S FAITH IN ITSELF ON THE WORLD SCENE MUST BE IN THE AMERICAN INTEREST, EVEN IF IT ALSO SERVES SOME SOVIET INTERESTS ALONG THE WAY. THEREFORE THE EMBASSY BELIEVES A STEADY WORKING OUT OF MORE SATISFACTORY US-CZECHOSLOVAK CONTACTS

SHOULD GO FORWARD ON EVERY FRONT WHERE OPPORTUNITY PRESENTS ITSELF. THE COMING TO OFFICE OF PRESIDENT FORD GIVES US A SPLENDID OCCASION TO RESTATE TO ALL THE EAST EUROPEANS OUR CONCERN FOR THEM AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF OUR EAST-WEST POLICY. FOR THEIR PART, THE CZECHOSLOVAKS, AS SHOWN IN FOREIGN MINISTER CHNOUPEK'S LETTER OF AUGUST 14 TO THE SECRETARY, ARE WILLING AND READY TO MOVE FORWARD WITH US.

6. THE AMBASSADOR COULD SAY THESE THINGS BETTER (AND MORE SUCCINCTLY), BUT WE BELIEVE HE AGREES FULLY WITH THE SUBSTANCE. AS FOR IMMEDIATE US POLICY, THE EMBASSY BELIEVES IT IMPORTANT TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE US-CZECHOSLOVAK CLAIMS AGREEMENT SIGNING AS A SYMBOL OF IMPROVED RELATIONS AND AS A PRELUDE TO MORE ACTIVE US-CZECHOSLOVAK CONTACTS. WE HAVE ALREADY RECOMMENDED THAT FOREIGN MINISTER CHNOUPEK BE INVITED IN THE NEAR FUTURE TO COME TO WASHINGTON IN THE FALL, FOLLOWING HIS RETURN FROM HIS UNGA TRIP, FOR SIGNING THE CLAIMS AGREEMENT. ON THAT OCCASION, WE WOULD HOPE AGREEMENT COULD BE REACHED TO ABOLISH TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS, AND THAT AN ANNOUNCEMENT MADE THAT FORMAL NEGOTIATIONS FOR AN EXCHANGES AGREEMENT WILL BEGIN SHORTLY. FINALLY, IF THE TRADE BILL IS PASSED, WE HOPE THAT PROGRESS WILL SOON BECOME POSSIBLE ON THE COMMERCIAL FRONT. IN SUM, DESPITE SIX YEARS OF SOVIET OCCUPATION, THE CZECHOSLOVAKS -- GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE, FOR VERY DIFFERENT REASONS -- WANT BETTER RELATIONS WITH US, AND WE BELIEVE IT IS IN OUR INTEREST TO MOVE IN THAT DIRECTION.

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